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TAGS: [PREL](#) [AE](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING WITH SHAYKH
MOHAMMED BIN ZAYED

Classified by Ambassador Richard Olson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Mr President: Shaykh Mohammed bin Zayed is looking forward to renewing your acquaintanceship, established during his 2006 call on you.

MbZ - The Man

12. (C) Shaykh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, or MbZ in USG speak, is the man who runs the United Arab Emirates. Officially he is the Crown Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (the most important principality of the seven emirate confederation) and his only federal title is Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces; in fact he is the key decision maker on national security issues. He will make deferential noises about his "boss" (elder half-brother President Khalifa, a distant and uncharismatic personage), but we assess that he has authority in all matters except for final decisions on oil policy and major state expenditures.

13. (C) Aged 47, MbZ is a leader not just in the UAE, but more broadly in the Middle East, where he is seen as a particularly dynamic member of the generation succeeding the geriatric cases who have dominated the region for decades. He is a reformer, actively seeking to improve the life of his citizens and the UAE's future through better education and health care, and through economic diversification, including investments in clean energy to prepare his citizenry for a post-hydrocarbon future. He is proud of the fact that despite having had the option of life of privilege, he rose through the ranks of the UAE Armed Forces, earning his wings as a helicopter pilot and retains a common touch that appeals to Emiratis.

MbZ and the Bilateral Relationship

14. (C) MbZ has staked his reputation, and his country's future, on its relationship with the United States, especially since 1990, when the UAE leadership saw that the United States was prepared to shed blood in the interests of preserving international order and stability in the Gulf. Since that formative experience, MbZ has built armed forces (especially his Air Force) that are closely aligned with the US. He is also a proponent of close economic, commercial, and where possible political ties with the US. He has generally tried to support us where he thinks we have been right (Afghanistan), but also where he thinks we have pursued misguided policies (Iraq). MbZ recognizes that partnership with the US is fundamental to the UAE's continued success, but he also knows that the relationship is controversial among his people, and that if the US is perceived as an unreliable protector, his own power base will erode.

Iran

¶15. (C) MbZ sees Iran as the primary external threat to the UAE and his regime. To his eyes, Tehran's threatening rhetoric, dominance by proxy, and pursuit of nuclear weapons is reminiscent of Saddam in 1990. Moreover, the confrontations with Iran during the late 1980s tanker wars, long forgotten in the West, are vividly remembered here.

MbZ is probably the most passionately anti-Iran of the Arab leaders, and the UAE's position is solidly with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan in seeing the principal threat to the region as coming from Iran. MbZ is particularly concerned at the divisions among the Gulf Arabs, and sees Qatar's and Oman's decision to accommodate, rather than challenge, Iranian power as troubling.

¶16. (S/NF) While MbZ is a hard liner on Iran, there are accommodationists within his own system, especially in Dubai, where the Ruler, Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum (Prime Minister of the UAE) takes a position that is much closer to Qatar's. For this reason, and because of the basic disparity in size and power between the UAE and Iran, the Emiratis prefer to be seen as quietly supporting a hard-line US position, rather than staking out their own views. MbZ is skeptical that US engagement with Iran will be successful in reversing Iranian positions on nuclear program, and believes that a policy of engagement puts him in an awkward position, both domestically and internationally. He will welcome thinking on next steps on sanctions.

¶17. (S/NF) Regarding the nuclear issue, MbZ believes that the logic of war now dominates the region. He regularly expresses his belief that Israel will launch a pre-emptive strike against Iranian nuclear facilities, most likely within next six months. This reflects his own assessment of the Netanyahu Government, but also, probably, what Israelis are telling UAE in their private exchanges. For this reason, one of MbZ's highest priorities is to finalize his integrated air defense system (including THAAD and Patriots) and advance bilateral contingency planning with the US. Because of Qatari and Omani wobbliness, he is uncomfortable with multilateral (GCC) military solutions. MbZ may float the idea of extending the US nuclear umbrella to the Gulf as a way of shoring up an anti-Iran coalition, and preventing a regional arms race.

Israel and the Arabs

¶18. (S/NF) MbZ's pre-occupation with Iran (and his secondary concern about Islamic fundamentalism) lead him to have a strategic view of the region that is curiously close to the Israeli one. But domestic politics flow the other way, and he feels constrained in what he can say publicly. Also, for reasons that are not entirely clear, the UAE still feels a need to hide behind Arab League and GCC consensus, and in particular behind Saudi Arabia (even when, as is now the case, bilateral relations with the Kingdom are rocky).

¶19. (S/NF) We should press MbZ to expend political capital in resolving the century old Arab-Israeli conflict. The issue cries out for leadership in the Arab world, not least so that the common interests of moderate Arabs and Israelis in containing Iran can find a political expression. So far, MbZ has not been prepared to run real risks in this area, but we should press him to. He appreciates the bold steps you have taken, and expects to be asked for help in this area.

Afghanistan-Pakistan

¶10. (C) The discussion on Afghanistan and Pakistan should be an easy one. The UAE has played a useful role since 2001, having deployed Special Forces there since 2003, and recently sending a Battalion sized task force during the elections. MbZ tried to organize a pan-Arab force, but could not overcome the resistance of Moroccans and Tunisians to send troops. In Pakistan, the UAE has been supportive of Zardari and played a very useful role both as donor and politically as one of the key members of the friends of Pakistan

grouping. MbZ agrees on the need to curtail Taliban financing, but is frustrated by our seeming inability to generate actionable intelligence.

CT/CP Cooperation

¶11. (C) The UAE has emerged as one of our principal partners in CT Cooperation through intelligence channels, having rounded up a number of cells over the past few years, and is moving toward cooperation externally as well. In the counterproliferation area, the UAE has interdicted 20 shipments over the past two years, including within the past few days, seizing North Korean systems bound for Iran. Domestic Export Controls have lagged somewhat, but the UAEG's bureaucratic structure for implementing its export control laws is finally emerging.

Conclusion

¶12. (C) MbZ views himself as one of our closest partners in the Middle East, and is keen to build on what has been an important aspect of his life's work, a good relationship with the US. From my perspective, our relationship with the UAE is one of the most promising and productive in the region.

OLSON